

The California Nutrition Network for Healthy, Active Families

**STATE PLAN for
October 1, 2006 – September 30, 2007**

A Food Stamp Program Access Improvement Initiative Conducted in Partnership with the California Department of Social Services

I. INTRODUCTION TO THE CALIFORNIA FOOD STAMP PROGRAM ACCESS IMPROVEMENT PLAN FOR FFY 2007

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service's (FNS) document entitled "Food Stamp Program State Outreach Plan Guidance" states that "the Food Stamp Act of 1977 provides that state agencies which administer the Food Stamp Program (FSP) have the opportunity to inform low-income households about the availability, eligibility requirements, application procedures and benefits of the FSP, and receive federal matching funds for such program information activities."

In California, the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) is the state agency responsible for administering the Federal FSP including development and implementation of the state Food Stamp Outreach Plan. A major reason why CDSS continues not to have a significant state-level Food Stamp Outreach Program with USDA FNS Food Stamp Outreach funding, has been a lack of State General Funds to trigger the 50/50 matching formula. This situation continues in FFY 2007 and provides partial justification for the fourth year of the California Food Stamp Program Access Improvement Plan (CFSPAIP) proposed for FFY 2007 through an Interagency Agreement with the California Department of Health Services (CDHS).

Interagency Food Assistance Committee (IFAC)

IFAC continues to be an important State level coordinating mechanism meeting convened quarterly by the CDSS Food Stamp Policy Bureau for the purpose of discussing and maximizing the coordination of key planning, administrative, and program activities primarily of state-level food assistance programs, with a major focus on the Food Stamp Program. The CDHS is a major participant in the IFAC meetings with representation from the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Supplemental Nutrition Branch, and the Cancer Prevention and Nutrition Section (CPNS), which administers the *California Nutrition Network for Healthy, Active Families (Network)* using USDA funds for Food Stamp promotion and nutrition education for Food Stamp recipients and eligibles for Food Stamp outreach. Other invitees to IFAC meetings include the California Department of Education, Health and the Human Services Agency Data Center, UCD, FSNEP and the CDSS Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) Projects.

Ongoing discussions at initial IFAC meetings about the critical need for Food Stamp outreach in California led to convening key public sector staff and nonprofit sector stakeholders and leaders in a working committee hosted by the *Network* known as the Food Stamp and Nutrition Education Outreach and Participation Committee (FANOut).

Food Stamp and Nutrition Education Outreach (FANOut) Committee

Based on its original work largely in 2002, this committee concluded that the Food Stamp Program in California was at a crucial crossroads with the Food Stamp participation rate estimated at about 50 percent of the eligible households according to USDA figures. In 2003, USDA's Western Regional Office (WRO) established a goal of increasing participation in the Food Stamp Program in California by a total of 225,000 individuals by September 30, 2005. A goal that was endorsed by FANOut and that became the primary goal of the resulting two year food stamp outreach project that formally began in FFY2004.

The introduction and piloting of EBT in California starting in 2002, designed to replace the use of Food Stamp coupons, was also seen by the FANOut Committee as a positive image change for the Food Stamp Program and outreach activities to build on perhaps making the program more attractive and with less stigma to new applicants and participants in the program.

The FANOut Committee also reviewed a set of county level information and data at its early meetings which identified counties in the state that had the highest levels of poverty, the highest levels of hunger and food insecurity, and the lowest levels of Food Stamp participation. It identified six priority counties for the resulting project to focus on.

In large part, it was the recommendations of the FANOut Committee and its six specialized subcommittees that, together with many discussions with the CDSS Food Stamp Policy Bureau and WRO staff, became the basis for the development of the CFSPAIP and the Food Stamp Outreach project conducted by the California Association of Food Banks (CAFB) in FFY 2004 and FFY 2005.

The FANOut Committee meets quarterly to review and discuss the status of Food Stamp promotion and outreach activities being provided by CAFB and other advocates and agencies in California. Other major issues routinely reviewed and discussed by the FANOut Committee include current Food Stamp participation rates, hunger and food insecurity data, and ongoing structural barriers in the FNS that, at times, make it difficult for income-eligible households to apply for the program and navigate the system, and discussions about best practices and the increased use of technology to help potential applicants access the Food Stamp program.

Final Report on the FFY 2004 – FFY 2005 CFSPAIP

The draft of the final report for the first two years of the CFSPAIP was submitted to senior staff at the *Network* in January 2006 for review and approval and subsequently forwarded to CDSS and USDA's WRO.

The final report provided:

- The historical development of the project.

- A detailed discussion on the status of the implementation of the CFSPAIP.
- A set of observations and recommendations for planning the FFY2006 project.
- A copy of the case study report entitled, “California Association of Food Bank’s (CAFB) Food Stamp Outreach Project” written and released by the *Network’s* Research and Evaluation Unit in July 2005.

The case study report provided an in-depth review and discussion of several of the field activities of the 11 county level food banks subcontracting with CAFB and providing food stamp outreach services primarily to clients receiving emergency food in the 13 counties served by the food banks and their many partnering food pantries.

Findings in the report included:

- The results of a survey of food bank staff identifying their perceptions of the major barriers to food stamp participation.
- A review and discussion of various outreach models and evidence of notable successes.
- A review and discussion of the most effective partnership and collaboration strategies and practices utilized by the food banks.
- A strong set of food bank staff recommendations for improving outreach practices and overcoming structural barriers imposed by the food stamp program.
- Comparison of FSP participation changes in counties with CFSPAIP contractors compared to statewide average. The one-year increase in monthly FSP participation was higher than the statewide average in 12 of the 13 participating counties.
- Estimates of approval rates— from 34 to 53 percent—based on applicant follow-up information from three participating counties. Reasons pertaining to the application process (failure to provide information and/or keep interview appointment) explained why a majority of the assisted applicants—from 55 to 66 percent—were denied.

Food Stamp Outreach in FFY2006

Food stamp outreach activities dramatically increased and improved in FFY2006, including the expansion of CAFB subcontractors from 11 in FFY2005 to 15 county level food banks and 5 community-based organizations (CBOs). In addition, a mid-year amendment to the CAFB contract approved by the WRO on May 25, 2006, increased the number of subcontractors to 18 food banks and 18 CBOs that were either subcontractors or sub-subcontractors scheduled to operate under 2 hubs in San Diego County and Alameda County. CAFB’s Federal Share for the balance of FFY2006 increased to nearly \$1 million.

Other Important Activities Occurring in FFY2006

1. CAFB, with *Network* approval, transitioned from scopes of work (SOWs) that were unique to each subcontractor, to a set of pre-approved standardized SOWs that subcontractors could select from based on such factors as the size of the subcontractor’s budget and their degree of Food Stamp outreach experience and organizational capacity. Experienced subcontractors with larger budgets tended to specify as many as 15 standardized objectives and activities along with larger target

numbers. Newer, less experienced subcontractors with smaller budgets tended to focus on three core objectives:

- The provision of basic Food Stamp information and materials
- The provision of pre-screening services
- Food Stamp application assistance

The standardized SOW approach made it easier for both the *Network* and CAFB to review and approve subcontractor's SOWs, provide training and oversight to subcontractors, and coordinate field activities.

2. Increased activity and support by FANOut's 800# Subcommittee helped put a new statewide toll-free Food Stamp outreach 800# in place in early 2006. It was keyed to the broadcast of USDA-funded Food Stamp outreach radio ads in English and Spanish nationally that aired in three media markets in California: San Diego, Monterey/Central Coast, and San Francisco/Bay Area in two waves of air play from March to April 2006 and from July to August 2006. CAFB quickly obtained a toll-free phone number (877-847-3663(FOOD)) through an Internet-based organization; Angel.com The telephone number was included in the radio ad scripts for California. In addition, three call centers in the target media markets were developed and trained to provide live operators to answer calls from listeners in approximately 15 counties who wanted more information about the Food Stamp program and possibly request assistance. Callers from other counties who were responding to the radio ads were directed by an automated voice response to their nearest Food Stamp office based on the ZIP code in which they resided. Incoming calls to the three call centers in March were 3,381 and April the centers received 2,971 calls. Given this very positive experience in FFY2006, the 800# Subcommittee will review the July and August call statistics and operational feedback obtained from the call centers, and in early FFY2007 recommend possible improvement and expansion of a permanent dedicated statewide 800# for callers to obtain Food Stamp program information and where to go for assistance from as many live operators as possible.
3. Additional Food Stamp outreach program technology came to the attention of the 800# Subcommittee during FFY2006 in the form of multiple pre-screening tools that would provide indications to CAFB subcontractors and potential Food Stamp applicants that certain income-eligible households should apply for Food Stamps. Some CAFB subcontractors were already using the pre-screening tool developed by the Los Angeles Regional Food Bank and many subcontractors were aware of the USDA pre-screening tool available on the Internet. Three other pre-screening tools attracted the interest of the 800# Subcommittee, CAFB, and its subcontractors. Of the three, the United Way of New York model received the most initial support because it had been previously funded with USDA money and is in the public domain; the tool has the capacity for interfacing with county Food Stamp programs' automated systems and potentially tracking the outcome of project-based applications. The 800# Subcommittee will take on the additional task in early FFY2007 of reviewing and recommending a specific pre-screening tool and tracking system to be acquired, customized, and piloted during the balance of the year.

4. Communication and working relationships between the *Network*, CAFB, and county Food Stamp programs incrementally improved in FFY2006. Much of the progress occurred between CAFB subcontractors and the Food Stamp programs in their respective counties. In addition, CAFB began regularly attending monthly meetings of the Food Stamp Committee of the California Welfare Directors Association convened in Sacramento by CDSS. Barriers to potential Food Stamp applicants remain at county levels and with the planning, testing, and evaluation of new outreach technology in California; therefore the involvement and cooperation of county Food Stamp programs will be of crucial importance. To address this, a second subcommittee of FANOut, tentatively titled the Food Stamp Program Infrastructure Improvement Subcommittee, will be part of the FFY2007 CFSPAIP.
5. A lack of information and understanding about the FSP and FSP eligibility in California continues to be a major problem among income-eligible households. The number of callers to the new 800# who heard the USDA funded radio ads indicate that there is interest in and a need for Food Stamps in the state. The *Network* knows, based on its nearly ten years of experience with marketing nutrition education through the media, that highly targeted mass and specialized media campaigns work if properly funded, designed and reinforced through multiple media channels. Unfortunately, USDA funding for Food Stamp outreach using the matching fund approach is currently significantly less than Food Stamp Nutrition Education (FSNE)-funded nutrition education media activities. The FFY2007 CFSPAIP will be seeking to strengthen use of the media in Food Stamp outreach in two major ways:
 - Recommending that USDA WRO reconsider the use of FSNE funds for Food Stamp promotion and strategically attaching such resources in parallel with planned Food Stamp outreach activities and campaigns.
 - Acquisition of private foundation funding and/or State General Funding, in part, to further the development of a healthy eating food security movement in California through the use of an aggressive media campaign highlighting the benefits of increased participation in the Food Stamp program for low-income households and stakeholders alike.